

Approved For Release 2002/08/22 : CIA-RDP55-00001A000100040008-4

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10 February 1951

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A THEORY OF THE RELATIONSHIP OF NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE TO NATIONAL ACTION

A. General Relationship

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The essential importance of intelligence lies in its potentiality for stimulating and serving governmental action. An intelligence report or estimate which is not prepared in direct relation to a current, contemplated, or probable action of the government is an exercise without official justification. Intelligence, far from being an end in itself, is an instrumentality of decision, a resource to be employed in the formulation, conduct, and review of governmental action.

As an instrumentality of decision, intelligence is needed in differing forms and quantities, which vary according to the nature of the action being considered. A primary intelligence problem, therefore, is the maintenance of flexibility and relevance - the problem of continuously matching the timing and substance of the intelligence product with the current, intermediate and long-range needs of governmental action. Relevance of intelligence to governmental action can be maintained only if the general morphology of such action is understood. With this point in mind an attempt will now be made to give an abstract description of the elements involved in the development of governmental action, as an aid in understanding how intelligence can best be brought to bear at each stage of the action.

B. The Action Cycle

It seems evident that any deliberate action (and most governmental action is in this category) is made up of the following phases:

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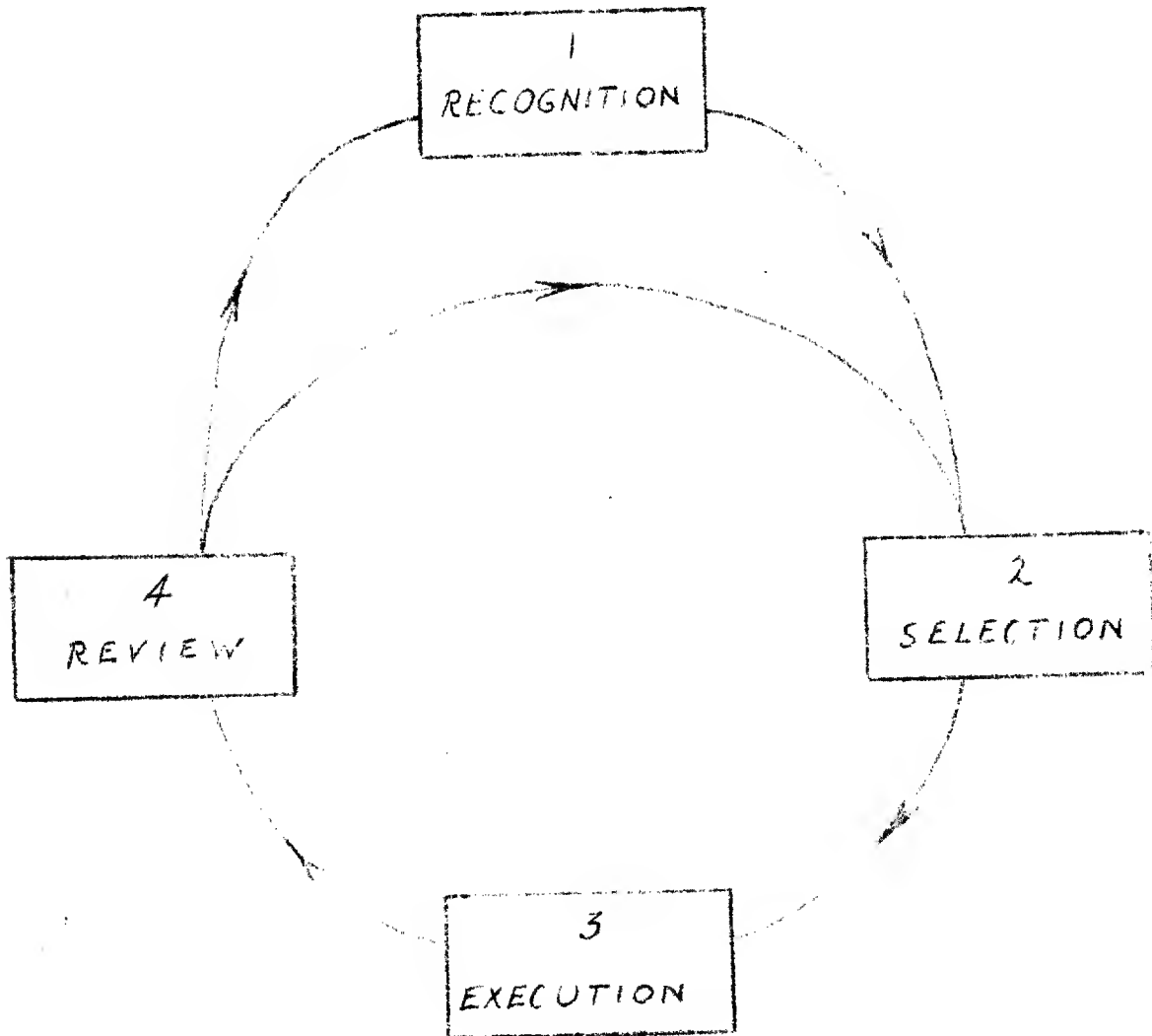
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1. Recognition that a requirement for action exists, or probably will exist.
2. Selection of the particular course of action best suited for satisfying the action-requirement that has been recognized.
3. Execution of the particular course of action which has been decided upon.
4. Review of results or effectiveness of the action.

Although these phases are listed in simple sequence for the sake of demonstration, examination of them in operation indicates that their relationship is cyclic rather than merely ordinal.

The completion of the fourth or review phase, for example, furnishes material on which a new decision must be based, namely, whether to abandon, continue, or alter the course of action being reviewed. This, naturally, is a return to the second, or selective phase from which the third and fourth phases should again follow. On the other hand, the fourth, or review phase may reveal the emergence of an entirely new problem requiring action, in which case one has, in effect, returned to the first, or recognition phase, from which the second, third, and fourth phases should follow once more. This type of cycle may be illustrated diagrammatically as below:

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The diagram pictures an action-continuum. It can be easily seen, however, that numerous governmental actions do not take the form of continua, because one or more phases in their ideal development are missing. There are, for example, governmental actions which are reviewed either inadequately, or not at all. This leaves a gap in the cycle which allows a course of action to trail off into a limbo instead of being deliberately changed, cancelled, or continued, as its effects become known.

Other examples of gaps in the ideal action-continuum occur when courses of action, after being chosen, are not implemented, or when problems requiring action are recognized, but left undecided.

The completion of an action-cycle, however, is not necessarily a measure of its excellence. Obviously it would be better if no decision followed the erroneous recognition of a problem, or if no execution followed an unsound decision.

The foregoing analysis of governmental action, however elementary, provides a basis for uncovering certain inescapable relationships between intelligence responsibilities on the one hand, and phases of the action cycle on the other.

C. Relationship of Intelligence to the Recognition Phase

The process of recognition is the key to succeeding stages of governmental action. When recognition of an action-requirement fails to take place, there is no possibility for the development of an action cycle. When recognition is tardy, decision and execution are likely to be hasty and ill-considered. When recognition is erroneous it gives rise to wasteful

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or harmful action cycles. For such reasons as these it is plain that recognition must be early, comprehensive, and accurate.

Since the governmental intelligence machinery is equipped for collecting, evaluating, and reporting foreign information pertaining to the national security, this machinery is the natural, and indeed the only complete vehicle for recognizing governmental action-requirements in the external world. In this sense the mission of intelligence is to sensitize and accelerate the process of recognition on the part of decision-making officials by supplying them with the sort of intelligence product that makes recognition unavoidable. This is more than a matter of keeping such officials up to date on what is happening. It is a matter of identifying important material in the mass of foreign information (which is available to intelligence officials alone) and presenting it in such manner as to make clear its present or future implications for United States security. The responsibility of intelligence officials to engage in such identification and emphasis of material for the benefit of action officials is heavy and inescapable, since only intelligence officials are in possession of all the pertinent foreign information.

Although this process of identification should be as systematic as possible, (in intelligence circles) there is no general theory in use concerning it as far as can be determined. The following observations may help in deriving such a theory.

Within the great mass of foreign information which is constantly received, evaluated, and analyzed, there is a certain proportion which

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either alone or in combination has sufficient implications for United States security to warrant special recognition by action officials. The medium for conveying recognition is the intelligence report or estimate, the subject-matter and form of which lie almost completely at the discretion of intelligence officials. This discretion is exercised within the general framework of national security considerations. However, these considerations are so broad and indefinable that they do not provide the articulation of national interests necessary for establishing production priorities in an overburdened intelligence organization.

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How, then can an intelligence official identify action-requirements which must be recognized by action officials? He can identify them in a general way as those things which offer substantial danger, disadvantage, or opportunity for the important foreign objectives and interests of the nation. Such general identification can be strengthened if the important foreign objectives and interests of the nation are known and analyzed, as they readily can be by reference to the cumulative and current papers of the National Security Council, all of which are available to the intelligence organization. These papers express the foreign objectives and interests of the nation in the concrete form of policies, action-decisions, and commitments. It can be concluded, therefore, that the proper identification of intelligence material warranting recognition by action officials depends, in the first instance, upon a detailed, rather than casual, understanding by intelligence officials

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of the content and implications of NSC papers. It goes without saying that all such NSC papers should be familiar to high intelligence officials, while those papers concerning specific areas or problems should be familiar to the intelligence specialists assigned to work in such fields.

Having found a general way in which action-requirements can be identified, and having demonstrated the relevance of NSC papers thereto, we can now arrive at a broad criterion ^{at the intelligence level,} for earmarking what should be recognized by action-officials. It may be worded somewhat as follows:

A situation, trend or event is important enough to be brought to the attention of action officials by means of an intelligence report or estimate if it is actually or probably capable of causing, now or later:

- a) the abandonment or alteration of a United States action, policy, or commitment set forth or implied in NSC documents
- b) the initiation of a United States action, policy, or commitment directly related to those already so set forth or implied.

Although the intelligence officer can satisfy himself concerning the relative importance of a given matter by employing the foregoing criterion, there still remains the task of conveying full recognition to appropriate action-officials by means of a report or estimate. The manner of transference of recognition from the intelligence circle to the action circle depends, of course, upon the nature of the problem under consideration.

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In the case of a situation which is occurring or has already occurred, the most effective way of conveying its importance is to describe first its present effects (in foreign areas) upon United States objectives and interests, and second, the further effects which will probably* follow from the situation in its present stage of development.

In the case of a future situation the most effective way of conveying its importance is to demonstrate first, the probability* of its occurrence, and second, the effects upon United States objectives and interests which will follow such occurrence.

D. Relationship of Intelligence to the Selection Phase

When an action-requirement has been identified and passed along in recognizable form to action-officials, the responsibility of intelligence does not end. It can be assumed that, sooner or later, an action decision will be taken in response to the action-requirement. If it is important that a decision be made at all, it is equally important that it be based on the best possible assessment of its consequences. In this respect, the intelligence needed for decision differs greatly from that necessary for recognition.

* The technique of determining and expressing probabilities is tangential to the theme of this paper. It can be said in passing, however, that the theory of contingent prediction appears to be most useful in reports or estimates designed to convey recognition.

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It has been shown that, during the recognition phase, the principal task of intelligence is to determine, for foreign areas, the effects of actual or probable situations on United States objectives and interests. During the selection or decision phase, on the contrary, the main task of intelligence is to determine the ^{probable} effects, in foreign areas, of possible United States decisions in response to an action-requirement. This is true because if intelligence, with its unique knowledge of foreign situations, sets forth the probable results of each alternative United States action in response to an action-requirement, the basis for decision is complete. Under perfect conditions, intelligence would predict the effects of each available course of action. In actuality, however, information is never perfect, thus making predictions equally imperfect. Regardless of this, intelligence has an inescapable responsibility for making the best estimates possible in proportion to the information available, or, in different words, for demonstrating the probable effects of possible United States courses of action. This type of intelligence product should be almost completely self-generating, and should automatically follow each identification of an action-requirement.

E. Relationship of Intelligence to the Execution Phase

After the choice of a course of action has been made, and the responsibility for its execution has been fixed, it is evident that in most cases a wealth of intelligence is necessary as a basis not only for formulating operational plans, but also for actually conducting the action. However, the nature, volume, and priority of this intelligence can be determined only by those responsible for executing the action, since neither their operational plans nor their day-to-day operations are anticipated by intelligence officers.

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Intelligence responsibilities with respect to the execution phase of governmental action therefore occur only when:

a) advance availability of operational plans makes support intelligence planning, possible

b) operational officials make requests for intelligence.

Nevertheless, these limitations do not excuse intelligence officials from conveying to operational officials any pertinent intelligence which comes to their attention.

F. Relationship of Intelligence to the Review Phase

The study of the actual results and effectiveness of United States actions in foreign areas is a field in which the national intelligence machinery should have unchallenged primary and unavoidable responsibility. To repeat what has been said already in this paper, only intelligence has the foreign information resources necessary for doing this job. However, one question that must be answered in this connection is: What actions should be reviewed?

It seems evident that a United States action should be reviewed if a knowledge of its results or relative effectiveness would have a measurable bearing upon any problem under actual or likely consideration by the National Security Council. If, for example, the Council is considering a new policy for Southeast Asia, an evaluation of the repercussions in that area of our military intervention in Korea is very much to the point.

Another category of actions which should be reviewed are those having a bearing upon intelligence identifications accomplished in connection with

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the first, or recognition phase of governmental action. If, for example, intelligence uncovers the probability of a successful revolt in Albania, a review of the effectiveness of our action, or lack of action, in regard to the Tito defection would be valuable.

The foregoing categories cover most of the self-generating action-review necessary on the part of intelligence officials. Requests for intelligence reviews can be expected, however, from both policy and operational officials.

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